

SWAT 34: Offering study results as an incentive to increase response rates to postal questionnaires

Objective of this SWAT

To assess whether offering participants study results increases the response rates to postal questionnaires.

Study area: Retention, Follow-up

Sample type: Participants, Patients

Estimated funding level needed: Unfunded

Background

Postal questionnaires are widely used to collect outcome data on participants. However, a poor response to questionnaires will reduce the statistical power of the study and may introduce bias. A meta-analysis of ten trials that tested the impact of offering study results to participants found this strategy to be ineffective, with the odds ratio for response with offering research findings is 0.92 (95% confidence interval 0.75 to 1.11) [1]. However, these studies were largely in the fields of education and marketing and it is uncertain whether results from such trials can be extrapolated to a healthcare setting. This SWAT was implemented in a randomised trial of calcium and supplementation with cholecalciferol (vitamin D3) for prevention of fractures [2].

Interventions and comparators

Intervention 1: 'Not offered the results': receive a one-page clinical questionnaire along with a request to give permission to send details of future research. All participants returning their questionnaire were informed of the trial's results.

Intervention 2: 'Offered the results' received the same questionnaire but with an additional question asking whether they would like to be notified of the results of the trial.

Index Type: Incentive, Method of Follow-up

Method for allocating to intervention or comparator

Randomisation

Outcome measures

Primary: Return of final follow-up questionnaire or reminder.

Secondary: None

Analysis plans

Response rates will be reported for the number of participants sent questionnaires, in both the intervention and control groups. Chi square tests will be reported, along with degrees of freedoms, p-values, odds ratios (OR) and confidence intervals. Adjusted OR for returning the postal questionnaire will examine the association between offering the results of the trial and the return of the questionnaire (OR, CI, p-value) for age and clinical characteristics.

Possible problems in implementing this SWAT

References

1. Edwards P, Cooper R. Previous trials of dissemination were identified. *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 2004; 58: 354-5.
2. Porthouse J, Cockayne S, King C, et al. Randomised controlled trial of calcium and supplementation with cholecalciferol (vitamin D3) for prevention of fractures in primary care. *BMJ* 2005; 330(7498): 1003.

Publications or presentations of this SWAT design

Examples of the implementation of this SWAT

Cockayne S, Torgerson DJ. A randomised controlled trial to assess the effectiveness of offering study results as an incentive to increase response rates to postal questionnaires [ISRCTN26118436]. BMC Medical Research Methodology 2005; 5(1): 34.

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